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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 001936

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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD, INR SMOFFAT, AND GTIP RYOUSEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/2019  
TAGS: [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KTIP](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: CHILD SOLDIERS ALLEGEDLY USED BY BOTH SIDES IN  
SA'ADA WAR

REF: SANAA 1847

Classified By: CDA Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Numerous credible sources report that both the ROYG and the Houthis are illegally recruiting and employing child soldiers to fight the war in northern Yemen. Although the ROYG military does not appear to be directly employing child soldiers, the tribal militias it has mobilized to fight alongside the Yemeni army are. There are accounts of forcible recruitment of child soldiers by the Houthis. Poverty, lack of opportunity, tribal notions of revenge, and cultural conceptions of manhood in Yemen all contribute to the phenomenon. Post will raise concerns about child soldiers with ROYG officials and inform them that individuals, whether public officials or private citizens, alleged to have recruited or used child soldiers face possible consequences under U.S. law. END SUMMARY.

ROYG TRIBAL ALLIES USE CHILD SOLDIERS  
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12. (C) Numerous credible sources report that both the ROYG and the Houthis are illegally recruiting and employing child soldiers. Andrew Moore, Yemen Country Manager for Save the Children, told PolOff on October 19 that there is "clear evidence in IDP camps that both sides are recruiting underage soldiers," although the extent of the problem is unknown. The case of one such child soldier was documented in an October 10 article in the Times of London. The 14-year-old had spent several months fighting as part of a tribal militia that had been mobilized by the government to fight the Houthis (reftel). He joined the war effort after his father, also a member of the tribal militia, was killed in the fighting. The young man reported that some of the Houthis he battled were themselves child soldiers. Moore noted that Save the Children does not have evidence that the military itself is recruiting child soldiers, "but the tribes fighting alongside the army are." However, Member of Parliament Mohammed al-Qahdi of the ruling General People's Congress told PolOffs on October 5 that the Yemeni army directly employs child soldiers as young as 15. He said that they were given uniforms, but not officially enrolled in or salaried by the army, so if they are injured or killed in combat, neither they nor their families receive compensation. Judith Evans, the Times of London journalist who profiled the child soldier, told PolOff on October 12 that she saw a lot of uniformed soldiers who looked no older than 14. Ahmed Arous of the Ministry of Defense's (MOD) Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) denied these allegations, informing the DATT on October 7 that the minimum age for joining the Yemeni military is 18, though he noted that soldiers sometimes look younger. (Note: In March 2007, Yemen acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which sets 18 as the minimum age for direct

participation in hostilities. End Note.)

#### HOUTHIS' USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

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13. (C) The Houthis are also believed to recruit child soldiers. Such allegations appear frequently in official publications such as MOD daily 26 September, which reported in early September that Houthis have forcibly taken children from their families and ordered them to fight on their behalf, threatening to kill their families if they refuse. Moore said that Save the Children has heard accounts from IDPs who say that their children were taken away by the Houthis. (Note: Save the Children has not documented any first-hand accounts from Houthi child soldiers. End Note.) "It's clearly happening," Moore said, "but how it's happening is unclear because there is so much rhetoric." He said that in some cases, tribes allied with the Houthis request that families provide one of their children for the war effort, a request that is complied with because war-fighting is a "moving to manhood" milestone. On September 22, the BBC quoted an IDP in al-Mazrak camp saying that the Houthis force children as young as 10 to become child soldiers, and that he himself had fled a Houthi advance in order to prevent his grandchildren from being forcibly recruited by them.

#### CULTURAL AND TRIBAL DIMENSIONS

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14. (C) Samer Haddadin, UNHCR Senior Protection Officer, said that the problem of child soldiers will be difficult to tackle in Yemen. He told PolOff on October 7 that in Yemen, "At 14 years old, if you are married, you are considered a

man. You have to put food on the table, your opinion is respected, you can even be a tribal leader. Why shouldn't you be able to join the army? You aren't a boy - you're a man." He explained that children also become involved in the war because of the lack of economic alternatives or to avenge family members' deaths. Ahmed al-Gorashi, chairman of local child rights NGO Seyaj, told PolOff on September 29 that his organization has been following the problem of child fighters in inter-tribal conflicts in the northern governorates of Hajja, Sa'ada, Amran and Jawf for some time, and has documented hundreds of boys fighting in tribal wars. With the increasing tribalization of the current conflict between the ROYG and the Houthis, these same young boys have been sucked into the larger war on both sides.

#### COMMENT

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15. (SBU) Given poverty, lack of opportunity, tribal notions of revenge, and cultural conceptions of manhood in Yemen, it may be that children join both sides of the fight without being forcibly recruited. Yet that is beside the point, because the use of child soldiers -) whether they joined the fighting willingly or were recruited forcibly -) is in violation of U.S. and international law. (Note: Under the Child Soldiers Accountability Act, leaders of foreign military forces and armed groups who have recruited or used soldiers under the age of 15 may be arrested and prosecuted in the United States. Furthermore, under the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, EDA, IMET, financing for the procurement of defense articles and services, and licenses for direct commercial sales of military equipment will be denied to the government of a country that is identified as recruiting or using child soldiers in its own armed forces or government-supported armed groups such as militias or civil defense forces. End Note.) Post will seek additional information about allegations that both the ROYG, whether directly or through tribal militias, and the Houthis are recruiting and using child soldiers. We will also raise our concerns with ROYG officials, informing them of the possible consequences if these allegations are substantiated. END COMMENT.  
BRYAN